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Editorial

THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF TRUTH

A TEST OF TRUTH

Amid the many and conflicting voices demanding allegiance and promising safety, the serious man sometimes wishes that truth might be attested by some unmistakable, but easily discernible sign. How easy and simple the problems of life would become if we were but in a position to apply a laboratory test to the various solutions that offer themselves! How clear the path of duty must have seemed to those who heard the "thus saith the Lord" of the prophets! Surely then the will of God was easily accessible to his children! But after all, was it? We venture to think that for the mass of men the task of determining the content of truth has never been any more simple or easy than it is now.

THE PROPHETS' PRESENTATION OF TRUTH

The prophets of Israel indeed seem to have been possessed of the conviction that they were the spokesmen of God. But they had no means of enforcing that conviction upon their hearers. The latter were confronted by exactly the same difficulty as the men of today in attempting to decide upon what was true. They had to reckon with the fact that the prophets did not always agree among themselves. The prophets of one age sometimes condemned the teachings of those of an earlier age, as in the case of Hosea who denounced the revolution under Jehu which had received the indorsement of the prophets of Jehu's own time. Contemporary prophets even did not always interpret the existing situation alike, as in the case of Isaiah and Micah, one of whom

declared Jerusalem inviolable when Sennacherib's army came against it, while the other predicted its complete destruction. Both were alike certain that they spoke the word of God. The so-called "false prophets" were ever present. Micaiah ben-Imlah, for example, was confronted by a body of four hundred prophets, equally certain with himself of the inspiration of Jehovah, who assured Ahab of victory in his contemplated campaign, while Micaiah could announce nothing but death and disaster. Jeremiah seeking to impress Judah with the futility of resistance to Babylon finds his efforts frustrated by other prophets like Haniah, who in a frenzy of patriotism and of loyalty to Jehovah foretell the complete overthrow of Babylon. Under such circumstances, what was the common man to do?

That this difficulty was keenly felt, appears upon the face of the Old Testament record. Jeremiah in his conflict with Hananiah sought to furnish a test of prophetic truth by declaring that the content of true prophecy had always been announcements "of war and of calamity and of pestilence"; consequently, the word of a prophet bringing a message of peace should be believed only after his prophecy had been realized in fulfilment. That is to say, none were to be accepted as true representatives of the will of God who did not agree with Jeremiah. The Deuteronomist puts the question squarely and answers it frankly: "If thou say in thy heart, how can we know the word which Jehovah hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah hath not spoken" (Deut. 18:21 f.). This means, of course, that when a prophet comes urging a certain course of action and making certain predictions in case his counsel is or is not followed, his hearers have no infallible means of knowing in advance whether or not his counsel is wise; they must act one way or the other and await the issue. Evidently the prophet was given no credentials attesting his authority. He had no means of compelling assent to his teachings. He could only state what he believed to be the truth and leave it to make its own impression and find for itself acceptance. His only passport to men's hearts and minds was the strength and purity of his own

character and personality on the one hand and the inherent power of his message on the other.

THE TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS

The situation was in no essential particular different in the case of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus recognized this fact and insisted upon the ability of truth and righteousness to speak for themselves and upon their independence of all extraneous indorsement whatsoever. He felt that if the truth as he presented it did not win the assent of men, it was useless to attempt to compel assent by other means. Those who have turned a deaf ear to the teachings of the prophets will not be convinced by any sort of extraordinary attestation. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead." Recognizing that the spirit of the age called for an exhibition of supernatural power on the part of one making such claims as himself, he said, "Why doth this generation seek a sign? Verily, I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:12). He had such absolute confidence in the truth and power of his message that he did not hesitate at times virtually to repeal sections of the venerated Mosaic law and to substitute his own principles for them. The same assurance sounds forth in other sayings: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." With all this confidence, Jesus and his followers were as dependent upon the open-mindedness of those to whom they preached and upon the self-evidencing character of truth itself as is any modern minister. They presented the truth of God to the men of their day for acceptance or rejection, and the vast majority of those who heard it refused to accept it. They were entirely free to do with it as they would. No compulsion not inherent in truth itself was brought to bear upon them.

TRUTH FOR ITS OWN SAKE

So has it always been and so must it always be. Truth in any realm must be accepted for its own sake, or not at all. The operation of any external forces or ulterior motives vitiates the whole

proceeding. Truth accepted primarily for any other reason than the consciousness that it is truth is discredited and insulted. Not only so, but the dignity and integrity of personality is insulted and violated by any external compulsion in this realm. It is man's highest privilege to decide for himself what forces shall dominate his life. Few functions of the personality are as high as that whereby he discriminates between truth and error, between right and wrong. Herein he attains the full stature of the perfect man. It would be criminal, if it were possible, to deprive any man of this right to the exercise of his highest powers. This aspect of the question of authority in things religious has not received the consideration it deserves. Authority has its part in the development of personality and that is an indispensable part. But for the full-grown spirit there can be no authority that is inconsistent with the fullest liberty of hospitality toward new truth. In the realm of truth there can be no slaves. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."